

La Casa de Geronimo Lopez
1102 Pico Street
~~San Fernando~~, Los Angeles County
California

Los Angeles

HABS No. CAL-341

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CAL-341
Page 1

~~Los Angeles~~
LA CASA de GERONIMO LOPEZ
✓ San Fernando, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: 1102 Pico Street, San Fernando
OWNER: William A. Millen and Louise Millen Penney
OCCUPANT: Dr. Virginia Palais (Office) and Two Tenants
USE: Medical Office and Two Apartments

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

A two-story town house of a prominent Californian from the Mexican era, built ca. 1878, in the California tradition during the period when Victorian and Stick style of architecture was in fashion, and consequently reflects the influence of one style upon the other, which was further emphasized by the remodeling of 1930's.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This two story adobe was the second house of Geronimo and Catalina Lopez in this area and is one of the first houses built in what is now the City of San Fernando.¹ The Lopez family played a prominent part in the development of San Fernando Valley. At the age of nineteen, Geronimo carried the flag of truce for the Californians as a member of the welcoming party which met John C. Fremont and his American soldiers at the old San Fernando Pass as the latter entered the Valley on January 11, 1847. Early in the 1860's, Geronimo and his wife Catalina moved to their newly purchased 47-acre tract near the San Fernando Mission and built a large adobe home that was to become a landmark known as Lopez Station. This was the first Lopez adobe and served as a stagehouse - the twenty-mule teams of Remi Nadeau stopped overnight on the way from Los Angeles to the Cerro Gordo mines in Inyo County. Here, the first post office was established for the Valley in 1869 and a little to the north the Lopez

CAL-341
Page 2

family started the first English-speaking school. The Miscellaneous Records of Los Angeles County include a map recorded in 1872, Book 2, pages 250 and 251, showing these buildings and the old stage road. Part of this ranch, including these buildings, is now covered by a reservoir of the City of Los Angeles. During the late 1860's and 1870's, the Lopez Station, a few neighboring adobes and the Mission were the only structures to be seen in the entire Valley.² It may also be interesting to note that Catalina's uncle, Don Francisco Lopez, discovered the first gold in California at Placerita (north of Newhall) in 1842 and thus contributed unwittingly to the eventual American migration.^{3, 8}

The present two-story adobe described in this report was built for the Lopez couple sometime between 1878 and 1883 by Valentin(o) Lopez, who was both a brother-in-law and second cousin to Geronimo.⁴ This structure, which was built about a mile east of the first adobe (Lopez Station), is typical for the period in general construction and notable for the band-sawn balcony balustrade and wood bracket capitals for the porch columns.

A plaque mounted at the first floor north elevation reads: "Erected 1883 by Valentin Lopez / Marked Nov 1st 1945 / by San Fernando Mission Parlor #280 / Native Daughters of the Golden West."

Published historical data is scant and rather inaccurate. An article by Marion Parks gives the date of erection as 1878 and the builder as Valentino Lopez, the son of Geronimo.⁵ Information from the account books of Title Insurance and Trust Company of Los Angeles indicates the earliest date as 1878 and the property registered to Geronimo Lopez. However, direct descendants state that Valentino was the brother of Catalina, the latter having married her second cousin and her maiden name was also Lopez, thus Valentino would have been the brother-in-law and second cousin to Geronimo.⁶

The following data on the physical history of the adobe was obtained from the descendants of Geronimo and Catalina and from early photographs in their possession, dating from 1900 and 1912.⁷

The present two-story adobe is generally similar to the original except that the single story adobe connected on the south, fronting on MacLay Street, was formerly detached from the main building by a breezeway and was used for a kitchen. The roofs were pitched, shingled and gabled at the ends. The porch roofs were similar to the present. The porch wood columns with bracket capitals and "jig-saw" patterned

CAL-341
Page 3

balustrade can be seen on the earliest known photo of 1900. However, the exterior porch stair at the northwest can not be seen in its present location and is believed, originally, to have been located on the west side but landing at about the same place on the second floor as at present. The windows and doors appear to be in the same locations with no change (i.e., double hung, screened doors, etc.) and the ground floor porch was formerly of wood.

About 1926, the Lopez Estate made extensive alterations. The single story adobe was connected to the main building and an arched door was provided at the old breezeway. An old screened porch on the patio side of the one-story unit was enclosed to increase the kitchen and with the old dining room adjacent in the main building and a bath in the kitchen unit, this became a separate apartment. The large living room to the west of the dining room, together with a kitchenette and bath, became another apartment on the ground floor. The second floor bedrooms were converted to another apartment consisting of a small living room (next to the stair landing) with a new door, a kitchen and a small dinette (enclosing part of the west porch), two bedrooms and a bath connected by a narrow hall. At this time the old shingles were removed and replaced with new mission tiles which destroys some of the original character of this nineteenth century adobe. Finally, the ground floor porch floor was replaced with a concrete slab and steps. In 1950's, the east or MacLay Street apartment was converted to a suite of medical offices for the present tenant, Dr. Palais. The other two apartments are currently rented as dwellings.

At this time there is no specific plan to save the adobe - one of the last remaining in this area. When the heirs of the present owners (a brother and sister who are grandchildren of the original owners) take possession, it is doubtful that they will maintain this property for historic purposes since it is now in a commercial zone with relatively high taxes.

REFERENCES

1. Withey, Henry F., FAIA - HABS Inventory Sheet, CAL-341, Library of Congress, July 1, 1958.
2. Robinson, W. W. The Story of San Fernando Valley, Title Insurance & Trust Company, Los Angeles, 1961, pp. 15, 19

CAL-341
Page 4

3. Interviews: September 9 and 18, 1963
Mrs. Grace S. Caldron, San Fernando - grand-daughter of Geronimo and Catalina Lopez and cousin of present owners;
Mrs. Penney and William Millen
4. Ibid
5. Parks, Marion, In Search of Vanished Days, Annual Publications HSSG, Vol. XIX, 1928, p. 46.
6. Mrs. Grace S. Caldron - above cited.
7. Mrs. Grace S. Caldron and Mrs. Louise Millen Penney.
8. California and Californians, edited by Rockwell D. Hunt, Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago and Los Angeles, 1930, Vol. 1, p. 298.

See also: Newcomb, Rexford, The Old Mission and Historic Houses of California, Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, 1925, p. 348; corroboration of the Lopez first gold discovery in the San Fernando Hills.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions: Approximately 50' x 25' for the main two-story adobe. The dimensions of the one-story formerly detached adobe are unknown.

Wall Construction: 22" sun dried adobe blocks at the first floor and 13" adobe blocks at second floor, set in adobe mortar, white-washed plaster for exterior finish.

Porches: A first and second floor veranda surrounds the two-story section along the east, north and west sides. The second floor west elevation was partially enclosed for a room in 1926. The most distinctive features are the decorative wood brackets at the top of the wood columns and the "jig-saw" balustrades cut from 1" wood boards. The latter are set in top and bottom moulded wood stops attached to wood rails, the bottom slightly raised from the second floor and the top is about 29½" high. The first floor of porch is now a concrete slab and the second floor is finished

CAL-341

Page 5

with 1x4 T&G boards supported on 2x6 joists running parallel with the veranda and connecting into wood beams which extend between the adobe walls and the columns, which are exposed from below. The columns are octagonally chamfered on the first story from below the neck mould down to the base which is also octagonal and of 2" thick concrete and resting on the porch slab; at the second story they are chamfered from below the neck mould down to the railings.

The porch columns are cut from 6" x 6" posts and spaced at about 8'-3" c.c., 3 bays at the east, 6 bays long at the north and originally 3 bays wide at the west; half of which is now enclosed. The ceiling of the second story porch is exposed 1x4 T&G sheathing across 2" x 5½" rafters at 31½" c.c., extending from the main roof. The veranda roofs are pitched much less than the main roof and hipped at the corners. Changed in 1926 from shingles to mission tile.

Doorways and Doors: Softwood frames with 6" wide plain casings around opening and applied stops. Typical original doors measure about 6'-6" in height with three horizontal panels in the lower half and a fixed glass light in the upper half. There is a small moulded wood "mantel" at the sill of the upper glass panel. One arched opening in the east wall of the single story section and one second floor door at the northwest corner were later additions. The wood framed screen doors can be seen in a 1900 photograph.

Windows: Softwood frames, double hung sash, 6 lights each section. First floor - about 2'-8" x 5'-9" with sill 18" up from the floor, 6" wide wood casings; second floor - 2'-3" x 3'-9", with plain wood casings, but 4½" wide.

Roof: Pitched 2x6 rafters at 31½ c.c.; original main gables were of vertical board and batten, later alterations of 1926 replaced this with exterior plaster and 3 outriggers at the gables. Also, during this time, the original shingles on all the roofs were replaced with mission tile and the single story unit roof was extended to the main building with the new connection at the breezeway.

Cornice: The former eaves were simply the extension of the shingles

CAL-341

Page 6

over plain facias. The later alterations replaced this with the mission tile extending over a small moulded cornice.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan: The first floor, before the 1926 alterations, consisted of a simple rectangle of a dining room and living room in the main building and a detached kitchen to the south. Circulation was through the rooms with a main entry on the east elevation. The second floor consisted of bedrooms reached by stairway on the exterior west porch. Circulation was by a central hall opening on the east veranda. After 1926, converted to two separate apartments on the ground floor and one on the second floor. Exterior 31" wide stairway now at the east porch.

Flooring: Typical finish was 1x6 T&G boards, now covered with hardwood, carpet, linoleum, tile, etc. The second floor construction is supported on beams and exposed from below as still seen in the old living room.

Ceiling: The first story had 1x6 T&G planks over beams exposed from below; the second story now has a textured stucco finish probably on wood lath, perhaps part of later alterations of 1926. Many rooms now remodeled and plastered.

Walls: The main adobe walls were finished with a thin coat of plaster and white-washed. Some of the original work remains. Later changes added partitions of wood lath and plaster on 2x6 studs and 16" c.c.

Doorways and Doors: Frames of softwood with plain wide wood casings and applied stops. Stock wood paneled doors of softwood, painted.

Trim: Wood cornice moulds observed at the second floor walls. Base of $4\frac{1}{2}$ " painted softwood, with stock shoe moulds.

Hardware: No original observed. Standard butts, metal knobs and locks of recent alterations.

CAL-341
Page 7

Submitted by,

William Woollett

William W. Woollett, AIA
AIA Preservation Committee

Prepared by,

Raymond Girvigian

Raymond Girvigian, AIA
Preservation Officer
Southern California Chapter, AIA

September 1963

APPROVED:

Charles S. Pope

Charles S. Pope, AIA
Supervising Architect, Historic Structures
Western Office, Design and Construction
National Park Service

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